



NEWSLETTER

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY



WHITLOCK DELIVERS MEMORIAL DAY ADDRESS

SDDVA Secretary Greg Whitlock delivered the Memorial Day address at the Mount Hope Cemetery in Watertown this week.

In his remarks, Whitlock asked attendees to remember the sacrifice of those lost and their legacy of duty, courage, and decency. He noted that it is with pride and gratitude that we pause on this Memorial Day to remember great and brave Americans -- to recognize their valor and rejoice in the blessings their bravery has secured.

He concluded his remarks by asking attendees to honor these heroes by imitating their courage and their sacrifice and their excellence. "They have left a legacy of freedom, and they taught their children and their children's children the value of sacrifice, and work, and virtue, the necessary conditions of freedom—and they taught us the love of country."



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KUDOS AND A BIG SHOUT OUT TO THE GREAT TEAM AT THE STATE VETERANS HOME

Congratulations and a big “SHOUT OUT” to our great team at the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home.

Last week, the Department of Health conducted an impromptu Infection Control Survey at the Home and there were no deficiencies. It was an unannounced survey but it didn’t matter, as the entire team has done an amazing job throughout the entire COVID-19 infection period and the excellent survey results are a testimonial to everyone’s hard work, dedication, and sacrifices in care of our residents and staff.

The surveyors were impressed by many things, especially the screening process, infection control, and knowledgeable staff. They also were very impressed with the new quarantine area that staff designed.

“We always welcome the South Dakota Department of Health and the VA Survey Teams to our campus,” said Superintendent Brad Richardson. “We learn from these professionals each and every time they’re on the campus. We are grateful to have Rachelle Butler, RN, running our infection control program. Rachelle meets and exceeds the standards asked of us in this important arena.”

“I’m very proud of the team we have built here and would like to thank them for the great care they provide our heroes,” said Director of Nursing Susan Wilcox. “DOH said the infection control in this building was “AMAZING” and were especially excited about the negative pressure rooms our team was able to create. They noted no other LTC facility in South Dakota had that.”

VA RESUMES IN-PERSON COMP AND PEN EXAMS AT SELECT LOCATIONS

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced it will resume in-person Compensation and Pension (C&P) exams in concert with the reopening of VA lead medical centers in select locations across the country. Unfortunately, South Dakota’s VA facilities are not on that list.

Veterans outside of these service areas will continue to be served through telehealth appointments or the acceptable clinical evidence process, which includes a review of existing medical records to provide information needed to complete the claim, whenever possible.

VA expects to expand the list of available locations as conditions allow, with guidance from various agencies driving decision making.

GARY SINISE FOUNDATION DONATES MEALS TO VA HOSPITAL STAFF DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced the Gary Sinise Foundation has committed to providing up to 20,000 meals to VA health care and front-line workers.

VA's Voluntary Service is working with the Gary Sinise Foundation Emergency COVID-19 Combat Service to identify the more than 80 VA medical facilities across the nation that will receive the meals over the coming weeks.

"Donations like this mean a lot to our VA staff as they are on the front lines of caring for our nation's Veterans every day," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "We are very appreciative of this donation during the COVID-19 pandemic."

"The donated meals will come from restaurants near these facilities, stimulating local economies and helping communities," said Chief Operating Officer of the Gary Sinise Foundation Elizabeth Fields. "Up to 250 meals will be donated to each facility depending on size and need." Since April 1, the Emergency COVID-19 Combat Service has been helping to meet the urgent needs of Veterans, first responders, military, health care workers and all of those on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic through serving meals, providing personal protective equipment and donating decontamination equipment across the country.



WHILE WE CAN NEVER DO ENOUGH FOR OUR DEFENDERS AND THEIR LOVED ONES

WE CAN ALWAYS DO A LITTLE MORE

VA CONDUCTS DEEP-DIVE STUDY INTO EFFECTS OF COVID-19 ON VETERANS

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) began a national four-year study on the impact of COVID-19 on veterans to help address critical questions about the disease.

Known as EPIC3 (Epidemiology, Immunology and Clinical Characteristics of COVID-19), researchers will study data and biospecimens, such as throat swabs and blood, to learn how the virus that causes COVID-19 has affected veterans.

“By analyzing data on COVID-19 risk factors, progression, outcomes and immunity, this VA research promises to significantly advance the fight against the disease,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “The study will complement a similar effort by the Department of Defense (DOD).”

The effort is led by VA’s [Cooperative Studies Program \(CSP\)](#) and coordinated by VA’s [Seattle Epidemiologic Research and Information Center](#). CSP epidemiology centers in Durham, North Carolina; West Haven, Connecticut and Boston are also contributing to the four-year study.

The study involves veterans infected with COVID-19 and those

who have recovered or who may be at risk but have not been infected by the virus. They are volunteers who are inpatients, outpatients and residents in VA’s Community Living Centers.

A similar study is being conducted by the Department of Defense (DOD) involving active-duty service members. At the end of their respective studies, the VA and DOD researchers plan to compare findings from the two study groups.

To learn more about VA research, visit research.va.gov.



STATE VETERANS HOME GROWS CLEAN ENERGY FOOTPRINT

The Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home is expanding our clean energy footprint by adding a 372.2Kw solar panel project to the campus.

Power generated by the solar system should provide most of the electrical needs for the campus. Special equipment was used to drill holes for the six foot plus ground screws that will hold the racking system for the panels. Topography of the campus has afforded the project a few challenges. Next week the crew will be dynamiting trenches to bury the cable from the panels to the electrical transformers.



Above is an aerial view of where the project will be.

GENPRO Energy, based out of Piedmont, South Dakota, is installing the system. Currently, GENPRO is working on two other projects in South Dakota—a 930Kw project at Black Hills State University and a 75.5 Kw project at Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation. They also have ongoing projects in New York, New Jersey, Nebraska, Delaware and the Bahamas.

If all goes well, the project should be completed by the end of July.

Visit: <https://genproenergy.com/> to learn more about GENPRO Energy Solutions.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Jun 14—Flag Day

Jun 21—Fathers Day

Jun 27—DAV State Convention—DAV Headquarters—Sioux Falls

Jul 6—Black Hills National Cemetery Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—9:00 am (MT)

Jul 10—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—Bldg. 145—Room 108—Fort Meade VAMC—10:00 am (MT)

Aug 24-27—SDDVA Annual Benefit School—Ramkota Conference Center—Pierre

Sep 3—Veterans Day at the SD State Fair

Sep 3-7—SD State Fair

Sep 11—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—VFW Post 1273—Rapid City—10:00 am (MT)

Oct 26-30—National Summit on Women Veterans Issues (more information coming)

Nov 13—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—Domiciliary Auditorium—Hot Springs VAMC—10:00 am (MT)

Dec 1—Governor's State of the Budget Address—1:00 pm (CT)

Jan 12—Governor's State of the State Address—1:00 pm (CT)

Jan 13—SDDVA/SD Veterans Council Legislative Reception

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